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Subject: Draft STIP comments
From: Lois Epstein <lois@inletkeeper.org>
Date: Thu, 29 Dec 2005 18:40:48 -0900
To: DOT_STIP@dot.state.ak.us

Thank you for considering these comments on the Draft Fiscal Year 2006-2008 STIP from Alaska Center for the Environment, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Cook Inlet Keeper, Government Hill Community Council, and the Sierra Club.

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1995-2005: Ten years protecting Alaska's Cook Inlet watershed & the life it sustains

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**Alaska Center for the Environment • Alaska Public Interest
Research Group • Cook Inlet Keeper • Government Hill
Community Council • Sierra Club**

December 29, 2005

Alaska Dept. of Transportation and Public Facilities
Statewide Planning Office
Division of Program Development
3132 Channel Drive, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801-7898
DOT_STIP@dot.state.ak.us

To Whom This Concerns:

Thank you for considering the following comments on the Draft Fiscal Year 2006-2008 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) on behalf of the Alaska Center for the Environment, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Cook Inlet Keeper, Government Hill Community Council, and the Sierra Club. We represent public interest, neighborhood and conservation organizations with membership in Anchorage and throughout the State.

This fall, the Department of Transportation announced that funding for the State's "core" transportation program had been reduced due, in part, to a congressional mandate to spend over \$450 million on the Knik Arm and Gravina Bridges. Communities across the State were severely disappointed to learn that long-awaited projects had been canceled or delayed in the Draft STIP in order to fund the two controversial bridges. In fact, over half of the State's transportation budget for the next three years will be consumed by the Knik Arm Bridge, the Gravina Bridge, and the Juneau Road if the current draft plan is instituted. Roughly two-thirds of the transportation projects proposed for future funding in the January 2005 FY2004-2006 STIP Amendment 8 have been eliminated from DOT's latest plan.

Cuts that we oppose include:

- \$311 million for **Seward Highway** safety and congestion relief improvements,
- \$256 million for projects deemed critical for **gas pipeline construction**, and
- \$146 million for the **Alaska Marine Highway**

Congress has since lifted the mandate to use the \$450 million for the two "Bridges to Nowhere" as they've become known nationally (and often, locally). The Department of Transportation now has a unique opportunity to re-evaluate how we should spend our transportation dollars. Among our highest priorities, we support funding for Knik Arm ferries, commuter and cargo rail north of Anchorage, carpool/vanpool facilitation on the Glenn Highway, and improved transit within Anchorage as ways to strengthen connections between the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage.

We look forward to commenting in the coming months on an Amendment to the Draft FY2006-2008 STIP in which the controversial Knik Arm and Gravina Bridges and the Juneau Road do not trump the other transportation needs of the state.

Sincerely,

Randy Virgin, Executive Director
Alaska Center for the Environment

Steve Cleary, Executive Director
Alaska Public Interest Research Group

Lois Epstein, P.E., Senior Engineer
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Stephanie Kesler, President
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Betsy Goll, Alaska Regional Representative
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